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Stolen Chair awarded The Field's Economic Revitalization for Performing Artists grant to create new business plan for downtown theatre modeled on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

As the economy continues its downward spiral, one downtown theatre company has found inspiration in the economic sustainability of **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**. **Jon Stancato**, Producing Artistic Director of **The Stolen Chair Theatre Company**, is one of seven artists to receive the Economic Revitalization for Performing Artists (ERPA) grant from **The Field** (funded by the **Rockefeller Foundation's** 2008 New York City Cultural Innovation Fund).

With the help of ERPA's initial \$5,000 grant award, Stolen Chair has hit the ground running to research and develop a sustainable business model for their process-based collaborative theatre company based on the mushrooming CSA model. In a CSA, a local farm collects seed money from a membership community several months before the growing season begins so they have capital to pay for equipment and labor (and seeds!). The members are investors in the farm's success and, as shareholders, are entitled to the farm's profit in the form of the produce. Like the CSA model, Stolen Chair's Community Supported Theatre (CST) will build a membership community of micro-producers who would provide 'seed' money for the company's development process and then reap a year's worth of theatrical harvests.

Stancato, an active member of his local CSA who has been praised as "one of his generation's most imaginative and daring directors" (Martin Denton, NYtheatre.com), believes the kind of person who likes "mud on their carrots" makes an ideal supporter of the laboratory theatre process. In a recent interview in NYtheatre Voices, he wrote, "In the very many ways it nourishes the individual and the community, in the ways it enriches a product by offering access to a process, and in the ways it supports both the creator and the consumer, the CSA model could transform the way a small independent theatre company and its audience base relate to each other, providing sustenance for the latter and sustainability for the former."

Stolen Chair is busy visiting local farms, interviewing farmers, and taste-testing the bounty. In addition to this qualitative research, they are quantifying demand, polling both theatre goers and makers to learn what constitutes a theatrical harvest (works-in-progress, open rehearsals, movie/research nights, "play dates," etc). Over 70% of their audience from their most recent production, the critically-acclaimed live funeral for the stage, *Theatre is Dead and So Are You*, participated in a survey assessing interest in such a program. In August, after the company's research is complete, Stolen Chair's CST model will be eligible for up to \$25,000 of support from ERPA to implement the program. The company currently plans to begin a pilot version of the CST in September 2009, timed to coincide with the start of development of their 13th original work, *Quantum Poetics*, a science experiment for the stage. Stolen Chair and Stancato hope this new model will be replicable for other small companies seeking stability in this economic climate and, after a trial year, will advise other companies seeking to make the transition to Community Supported Theatre.

Chosen as "Best of Manhattan 2007" by New York Press, **The Stolen Chair Theatre Company** is a critically-acclaimed award-winning collaborative theatre laboratory dedicated to the theft, recycling and re-examination of historical performance styles, and to the creation of visually stunning and uniquely contemporary work where the earnest and ironic happily co-exist. Since its inception in 2002, Stolen Chair has created 12 critically-acclaimed original works including the absurdist noir *Kill Me Like You Mean It* and the Weimar child's-play cabaret *Kinderspiel*, both published by United Stages. Their 2005 silent film for the stage, *The Man Who Laughs*, was published in the anthology *Playing With Canons: Explosive New Works from Great Literature by America's Indie Playwrights*. Stolen Chair's programs are supported, in part, by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.